

SOCSD student from Hawaii aids wildfire victims3 min read

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Olivia Bethea discusses her Community Action Project on the Maui Wildfires during the Sedona Red Rock High School Winter Concert and Student Showcase at the Sedona Performing Arts Center on Thursday, Dec. 14. David Jolkovski/Larson Newspapers

“I’m 2,000 miles away from what happened ... this is my way of helping from a distance,” was how Olivia Bethea, a senior at Sedona Red Rock High School, described her Civic Action Project, in which seniors research and present on a topic and recommend a course of action to solve a problem. Bethea is raising funds for Maui wildfire relief.

The August wildfires on the island of Maui were the deadliest to occur in the United States in the last century, destroying an estimated 2,200 structures and causing 100 confirmed deaths.

For Bethea, the experience was personal because she grew up on Maui.

“Olivia moved to Sedona from Hawaii. She is originally from the same area that was affected by the wildfires,” Sedona-Oak Creek School District history and government teacher Katharine Hill said of Bethea’s project. “So this was an extremely personal project. She edited and put together a video based on a combination of stuff she saw on the news and then also video that [she] had taken and that [her] friends had taken.”

“My dad got a job offer [in Sedona], so he came out here last winter,” Bethea said. “We took a vacation out here for about two weeks ... to see if we liked Arizona and decided to move here in February of 2022, and we still had our house on Maui and we were renting it out to one of my friends.”

The fires also destroyed one of Bethea’s favorite after-school hangout spots, Cool Cats.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/Dk7RQIheXxs>

“It was a restaurant where you could see the ocean directly from there. It was kind of like an outside restaurant, but it had 1950s dining on the inside,” Bethea said. “It had the best milkshakes ever and they also had the best fries. And right below the balcony, you can see all the cars driving past.”

Bethea’s older sister, Helena Saito, still resides on Maui and is helping her identify people in need of direct aid. The total amount Bethea raises will be split among the six families she has identified as needing support.

“My best friend lived five minutes away from me, she lost her house,” Bethea said. “So I found out that I lost my house from her before I found out from the news, because that was a direct source ... and being [here in Sedona] and her being over there was hard because she was my best friend. It was hard because she was dealing with the fire and I didn’t exactly know what to say.”

Bethea said she has raised about \$200 so far, and she would like to meet her goal of raising between \$500 and \$1,000. Her GoFundMe account for the project can be found at [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) by searching for “help the families in maui impacted by the wildfire.”

“I wanted to do this project, because it’s very personal,” Bethea said. “Because being from Maui, it’s been hard, because I wasn’t there when the fire happened. So seeing that on the media, and seeing that happening to my hometown and being unable to help [made] me feel helpless. So this is my way of giving back to the community.”